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AUTHOR Ripstra, Constance C.; Highlen, Pamela
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ABSTRACT

This document presents the argument that it is time for the school counselor to accept the dual role of counselor-researcher. No longer does the practitioner-researcher have to rely on the difficult and time-consuming comparative group research design. Rather, he has available to him an intensive design or empirical case study approach to research. This design is well suited to the school counselor for several reasons: (1) focus is on specific individual behaviors rather than on average group comparisons; (2) the counselor can integrate research with his current counseling responsibilities; (3) the design minimizes drastically the use of statistics to control for individual variability; (4) it allows for more effective intervention because of continuous examination of changes in the client's behavior; and (5) it provides a controlled method for examining covert as well as overt individual behavior. The intensive design is further recommended as a valuable method of evaluation of counseling effectiveness and as a tool for research contributions by and for counselors in the field. (Author/PC)

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THE COUNSELOR AS APPLIED RESEARCHER

By

Constance C. Ripstra
and
Pamela Highlen

Behavioral Counseling Laboratory
College of Education
Michigan State University

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Because of her inattentive behavior, Amy was referred to Ms. Bennett, the school counselor. After making observations of Amy's classroom behavior over a two week period, the counselor and teacher placed Amy on a token economy system. Under this plan Amy received points at specified intervals for her attentive behavior which she could cash in for various activities and privileges. For inattentive behavior Amy lost points. The teacher monitered Amy's behavior during this period. After a two week period the intervention was removed. However, observations of Amy's behavior were continued during the next two weeks to determine if the intervention had been effective.

Most school counselors are already familiar with the procedures our hypothetical counselor employed. Likewise, many already realize that outcome measures can give both client and counselor a precise indication of counseling effectiveness. However, many counselors may not realize that our hypothetical counselor has just conducted a controlled research study.

Unfortunately, too many members of the counseling profession consider the roles of counselor and researcher mutually exclusive (Dietz, 1972). School counselors counsel; university professors teach and conduct research. This arbitrary role differentiation, in fact, is hindering the development of counseling as an applied science. In 1968 John Whiteley called on counseling researchers to provide solutions for the kinds of problems counselors face daily. However, practicing counselors have found the results of most counseling research irrelevant to their daily work. In order to make research relevant to the needs of school counselors, more field research needs to be conducted by counselors as well as researchers.

It is, indeed, time for the practitioner to become the counselor-researcher.

Typically, the school counselor would hesitate to accept the dual role of counselor-researcher for the following reasons: (1) lack of time; (2) lack of statistical knowledge; (3) unfamiliarity with extensive research designs; (4) lack of a sufficiently large number of subjects or clients with similar problems, and; (5) lack of administrative support for research activity. These are realistic limitations if we assume that the only type of research design involves comparative group studies.

Historically counseling research has relied heavily upon comparative group research designs. These extensive designs employ groups of subjects, require knowledge of inferential statistics to analyze data, and present problems of statistical sampling and control. Furthermore, extensive or nomothetic research, while often statistically significant, can lack meaningful and practical significance for the working counselor. As a result of our profession's emphasis on extensive designs, the idea that controlled scientific inquiry can be done without large groups of subjects and complex statistics is virtually unknown by the school counselor.

Today a viable alternative is available to the school counselor wishing to conduct experimental research. Thoresen (1969, 1972) has called it the intensive design or empirical case study, while others have labeled it "N = 1" research (Edgington, 1972) or the idiographic design. Simply stated, the intensive design involves repeated and frequent observations of one individual over time. The investigator gathers data repeatedly during a baseline (pretreatment) phase. Usually an intervention (treatment) is then introduced. During this phase the experimenter continues to gather data on the subject. Data is also collected following the intervention (return to baseline) and at various follow-up intervals. This is the

pattern our counselor followed in working with Amy. With an intensive design the counselor can evaluate the client's process of change by frequent observation and, thus, be in a better position to change the intervention to increase the probability of counseling success. The assumption is made that individual variability in performance is not accidental, but is a function of circumstances in the environment. With an intensive design experimental control can be used to examine this variability, and certain conditions can be altered to see if change occurs. While time is an ignored variable in most studies, time as well as observed changes under various conditions in time are the master variables in an intensive design. Statistical control of individuality is unnecessary because the subject serves as his own control in regard to background and unique learning history.

By systematically recording background information, fluctuation in performance data, and individual characteristics, the counselor can state specific parameters or characteristics of the population for which the results of his study may apply. These parameters can be used to ascertain whether other clients are similar enough to the "research" client to merit using the same treatment. Because of added control and the wealth of descriptive information obtained, the counselor can generalize his research findings, as well as form further hypotheses which can be tested with traditional experimental methodology to establish cause-effect relationships. From a researcher's perspective the process provides the opportunity to study behavior in real time to discover the variables that affect the behavior (Schutz & Baker, 1968).

Obviously the intensive design is well suited for the school counselor, since the specific behaviors of an individual are the unit of focus rather

than average comparisons between groups of individuals. The counselor can conduct "N = 1" research at the same time he counsels students. Thus it is possible for the counselor to integrate research with his current counseling responsibilities. As previously mentioned the intensive design minimizes the use of statistics to control for individual variability. Therefore, the counselor does not need extensive knowledge of inferential statistics to analyze his data; White (1972a, b) has developed a median statistical procedure to analyze "N = 1" data which would be easy for a counselor with little research or mathematical background to use.

The intensive design also allows the counselor to continuously examine changes in the client's behavior and affords more effective and efficient intervention. With professional accountability becoming an issue in most states systematic data collection offers a method of establishing evidence of competancy.

The intensive design provides a controlled method for examining covert as well as overt individual behavior. Since the counselor is concerned with the whole individual the intensive desing provides a viable method for examining internal states, feelings, as well as external ones, behaviors. The use of intensive designs by school counselors also facilitates the consultation function in that it provides a clear opportunity for the involvement of the classroom teacher in modifying a student's behavior. Finally, through systematic replication of results with the same client or across individuals, causal relationships can be established between particular treatment effects and desired client change. Through his research efforts the counselor can share his innovative techniques with professional colleagues, thus adding to the research findings having practical significance.

The preceeding remarks are directed as much to counselor educators as to counselors in the field, for the training in practical research methodology is in their domain of responsibility. This has been an obvious deficiency in most counselor education programs. While group research is most prevelantly taught, it is most impractical within the limitations of most counseling settings. Therefore, the intensive design is recommended to counselors and counselor educators as a valuable method of evaluation of counseling effectiveness and as a tool for research contributions by and for counselors in the field.

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